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RCM London

Society of Women Musicians

Report on Festival of Britain Concerts

The Council has much pleasure in presenting a report of the Society's contribution to the London Season of the Arts during the Festival of Britain, 1951.

Three special programmes were given, in which fifteen composers were represented, and twenty-three artists appeared as performers - all members of the Society. The first steps were taken in June 1949, when your Council offered two public concerts to the Arts Council of Great Britain, the body responsible for the organisation of the London Season of the Arts. The offer was accepted, and the Arts Council on their side gave a certain guarantee against financial loss.

The two public concerts were preceded by an afternoon At Home, on May 19th inaugurating our splendid new place of meeting, the Great Drawing Room at 4, St. James's Square, where fixtures will take place in future, by kind permission of tho Arts Council. This At Home was planned to give visitors to the Festival an idea of the Society's usual fixtures, but on this occasion the programme consisted entirely of compositions by members, opening with two movements of Dame Ethel Smyth's string quartet, which had been performed for the first time at the Society's first concert in 1911. This was followed by works by Ruth Gipps, M. Talbot-Hodge, and Bridget Fry.

Tho first Festival Concert was on June 13th at the Cowdray Hall, and the programme included tho Sonata for Viola and Pianoforte by Rebecca Clarke, (in which wo had the collaboration of our President), and songs by other members. In addition, we were asked by the Arts Council to make a place for a piece of music composed by Elizabeth Poston, specially commissioned by the Pipers' Guild.

For our concert at the Queen Mary Hall on June 27th, we engaged the Riddick String Orchestra, of which the conductor, leader and several players are S.W.M. members. As well as works by Elizabeth Maconchy, Ann Hamerton and Elizabeth Poston, and a group of songs by other members, a performance was given of Haydn's 'cello concerto with the original orchestration. A most interesting historical note on this work was contributed to the programme by Miss Marion Scott, founder of our Society and one of the greatest living authorities on Haydn.

As members will realise, the planning of these programmes was no

easy task. Composer members had been invited to send in compositions for consideration, but in selecting works for performance many factors as well as musical merit had to be considered; the instrumental combinations available, the balance of the programmes, expense, and the fact that all performers (excepting 'mere males') had to be members of the Society. Moreover, it was the desire of your Council to give as comprehensive a picture as possible of women's work in music during the forty years existence of the Society, without stressing any particular generation or style.

The Council hopes that members will feel that this contribution to the Festival of Britain is an achievement of which the Society may well be proud.

A detailed financial statement will be made at the Annual General Meeting on November 17th.